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Facing History: Sovereignty and the Spectacles of Justice and Violence in Poland's Capitalist Democracy

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Do not gaze into the pools of the past.
Their corroded surface will mirror
A face different from the one you expected.
———Czesław Miłosz, *The Child of Europe* (1973 [1946])

"For half a century we passed them on the street without knowing who they were. Now we are showing their faces—the faces of the security service officers who served for the Soviet Union and the Communist Party, aiming to tame the society and harming Poland and the Poles." These words frame the public exhibition Twarze Bezpieki (The faces of the security service) that took place in Kraków in March 2006.[1] During the rule of the right-wing government from 2005 to 2007,[2] the state-run Institute of National Remembrance (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, henceforth IPN) organized a number of Twarze Bezpieki exhibitions in the public squares of cities and small towns across Poland. Each displayed on big boards the photographs of about a hundred former security officers previously employed in the place of exhibition so that the viewers could recognize their faces.

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[1] At: http://fakty.interia.pl/fakty-dnia/news/zobacz-twarze-krakowskiej-bezpieki,728271 (last accessed 25 Mar. 2016).

[2] For the term "right-wing," I draw mainly on David Ost (2005) and Rafał Pankowski (2010), who use that term in their analyses of Polish politics for the groups that self-identify as "right-wing" or employ a conservative nationalist discourse based on an ethnic-religious definition of nationhood and are marked by an anti-pluralist, exclusionary orientation against sexual, ethnic, and religious minorities, and foreigners.

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Exhibiting publicly the faces of the enemies or unmasking them in public arenas is not novel in history. It is no secret that the field of vision has been a topos of power. Show trials, public executions, and public spectacles of the criminal, condemned, or enemy choreographed for the eyes of "the people" are central to the performance of sovereign power. As Michel Foucault (1979: 3–69) argued, it is where power constitutes itself as sovereign, aspiring to incorporate visually and viscerally the will of the people, their "curiosity" and "vengeance," into its mechanisms of punishment. It implicates them as spectators complicit in the ceremony of violence that proceeds in daylight. While punitive practices might today largely operate in the dark of prisons away from public sight, the spectacle has not withered away. It continues to function, albeit in a different regime of publicity, secrecy, and the rule of law, and in technologies of media and mass violence.

Recently, many state institutions have been founded in Eastern Europe to nationalize memory and write a history of violence. This was not simply the return of the repressed. It was also meant to invigorate nationalist sentiments on the basis of sacrifice and victimhood, rejuvenate national sovereignty, and redraw the boundaries of the national body. Those who tracked down the "enemies of the people" were to come back as the treacherous enemies of the nation, such as the head of the first Soviet secret service Cheka, Feliks Dzierżyński. The demolition of his statue in Warsaw was a huge public spectacle, a performance of what would have been his "execution," as Katherine Verdery has suggested (1999: 3–9). Twarze Bezpieki exhibitions took place in this context. Using a language of justice and transparency, they associated the faces with cruelty, treachery, and crime; not just any crime, but above all what is called "communist crime" (*zbrodnie komunistyczne*).[3] These "infamous" people who "always enjoyed impunity," as a local media report put it, "at least now ceased to be anonymous."[4] Where evidentiary problems made it impossible to sentence them to prison through a criminal proceeding, the IPN chose to expose their faces in the open, invoking the older technique of "punishment-as-spectacle" (Foucault 1979) in the post-socialist context. If unmasking secret agents of imperialism was a popular activity in Soviet-type socialist regimes (Fitzpatrick 2005; Getty and Naumov 2010), the public exhibitions of the faces of ex-communist agents have drawn no less attention. What the viewers saw, however, was not the body of the condemned or a live execution of the criminal in flesh and blood, but rather the photographed faces of the former security officers—the faces of uniformed men in their banal, official appearance (figure 1). It was not the eighteenth-century France of Robert-

[3] Similar exhibitions that deface the ex-security officers were organized in the Czech Republic (Pakier and Wawrzyniak 2013).

[4] At: http://katowice.naszemiasto.pl/archiwum/twarze-katowickiej-bezpieki,1420570,art,t,id,tm.html (last accessed 30 Mar. 2016).

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FIGURE 1 Katowice Twarze Bezpieki Exhibition. Photo: Grzegorz Celejewski/Agencja Gazeta.

François Damiens,[5] but rather the twenty-first century of Twarze Bezpieki that drew on the liberal discourse of transitional justice based on redemptive ideas of publicity, knowing the truth, exposing violence, and shaming perpetrators through legal and extralegal practices, including truth commissions and media activism (Hazan 2010; Scott 2014).

Curiously, the exhibitions stirred much controversy and prompted heated criticisms by many groups, including human rights activists and veteran dissidents who had been personally targeted by the communist-era security service. Was it a pursuit of justice or a call for public lynchings? A means to ensure public transparency and trust or a repulsive political pornography? A means to heal the wounds of traumatized society, localize guilt, and identify the "faceless" evil of communism or a political instrument in the service of anti-communist nationalists' "moral revolution" (*rewolucja moralna*)? The exhibitions harbored many dilemmas and suspicions, as well as shattering surprises. As much as they revealed about *past* state violence and its aftermath, they also became the site of unexpected interruption and manifestation of effaced and displaced modalities of violence, especially capitalist violence.

In this article, I focus on these public exhibitions of the faces to explore the nexus of sovereignty, violence, and transitional justice in Poland's capitalist

[5] Foucault famously used the punishment of Robert-François Damiens to open *Discipline and Punish* (1979).

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democracy. I am concerned with the social-historical conditions of nationalist appropriation of transitional justice into a state politics of sovereignty, based on the sanctity of moral purity and victimhood. I will trace these conditions within the broader tensions and contradictions of freedom and inequality integral to the making of post-socialist sovereignty and show how the figure of the (secret) communist agent, as articulated by anti-communist nationalism, expresses those tensions, facializing at once the unsettled legacy of the communist-era state violence and the largely "normalized" violence of capitalist transformation. But I also want to suggest a more general theoretical point about the theme of violence and transitional justice. By highlighting the relations between different forms of violence, I argue that, unlike how it is often studied, *past* violence, which is the typical object of transitional justice, must be approached in a dynamic and relational manner, with a focus on conjunctures—the ways different forms of violence become transformed, reproduced, or entangled across time and space. The legacy of communist-era violence must be understood not as fixed in the past or in isolation from present relations of power and inequality, but rather within the "general economy of violence" of post-socialist transformation.[6]

The face lies at the center of this analysis. It is not only the main object of the IPN exhibitions, but the focus on the face also sheds light on the modes of communication, visibility, and representation employed by the IPN spectacles of justice and transparency. This line of inquiry also offers a comparative perspective on transitional justice. Curiously, the face as an object of study has received scant attention even though it has been commonly invoked by the global transitional justice discourse and practice, with phrases like "facing history or injustice" (Hinton 2011; Minow 1999; Teitel 2013). The face, as a figure of representation or mode of appearance, is not easy to pin down. It has been historically entwined with the contentious moral and political questions of secrecy, guilt, and purity, as in, for instance, ancient and modern physiognomy. Indeed, Giorgio Agamben (2000) suggests that the face could be conceived as the locus of political struggle and sovereign power aspiring to "take possession" or "control" of appearance. Consider the central place of the face in media spectacles of war, the advertisement industry, corruption scandals, and electoral campaigns.

We may link the face even more firmly to modern sovereign power. Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat have succinctly described sovereignty as "the ability and will to employ overwhelming violence and to decide on life and death" (2005: 1).[7] Drawing on comparative historical analysis of modern European and (post)colonial state formation, they suggest that

[6] I borrow the term, "general economy of violence" from Etienne Balibar (2015).

[7] The literature on sovereignty is vast, and here I draw mainly on Hansen and Stepputat's useful overview (2005).

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sovereignty must be understood not as a finished product or state of power, but instead as a contingent effect of power, an aspiration for total control and supremacy over contending authorities, often in a territory. As such, sovereign power, they observe, is remarkably fragile and uneven in its constitution, unlike how it projects itself. To establish itself it needs to be constantly performed through rituals and ceremonies of violence directed against the bodies and populations it calls dangerous or contaminated. The logic of purification and expulsion, and the production of the disposability of certain forms of life, are common features of sovereign violence. The face plays a crucial role in this context. It is used to mark, memorialize, and represent the dangerous groups or enemies—for example, in the Soviet dehumanization of imperialist agents with deformed faces, or the use of Osama bin Laden's face in the U.S. "war on terror"—via which sovereign power aspires to establish itself and redraw the boundaries of political community (Butler 2004; Foucault 2015). Moreover, we can relate the face to Claude Lefort's (1986) conceptualization of the symbolic structure of modern democratic sovereignty as the "empty place" of power, which in principle belongs to no one and can be occupied, albeit temporarily, by everyone who claims to rule. The invocations of the face *appear* to visualize that claim by giving a face to the subject inhabiting the empty place.[8]

This is not to say that the face is a mere transparent instrument or contentless rhetorical device. In my analysis of Twarze Bezpieki, I am precisely concerned with what the faces *do*, in both the space of representation and the symbolic-material space of market squares; what the exhibited faces of security officers *enable* people to articulate, feel, and make visible, just as they silence and make invisible other things. I will use media reports, interviews, and other ethnographic material to examine social reactions to the exhibitions, particularly ways in which the faces *mediate* different and often conflicting desires about justice, equality, and secret knowledge, as well as fears of state repression and surveillance concerning both the communist past and the post-socialist capitalist present.

At the outset, let me highlight a caveat. It is often claimed that the people who have been critical of the IPN exhibitions' or others' pursuits of transitional justice must have something to fear regarding their own and their associates' secret, compromised pasts (e.g., Nalepa 2010; Zybertowicz 2013). Notice that this is also the tired argument rehearsed by the conservative proponents of state security policies in, say, the United States about the "war on terror." "If you oppose it, you must be hiding something." A critical attitude is taken as a sign of secret guilt. But another common explanation of the transitional justice activities also personalizes the issue: the mainstream Polish media typically criticize the conservative nationalists who lead them, who they portray as

[8] See also Karen Strassler (2009), for an insightful study of the face and sovereignty.

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incurably vengeful, irrational, and even barbaric. This is presented as being a cultural or civilizational problem. When the revanchist, "right-wing Bolsheviks" appropriate otherwise good transitional justice measures, it is said, they turn them into dangerous, counter-revolutionary security instruments (Michnik 2015). The framing of conflict in such culturalized and personalized terms is politically highly unproductive in addressing the problems of social exclusion and inequality, which provide a fertile soil for right-wing populism.

My analysis departs from these two positions, and instead situates Twarze Bezpieki exhibitions within the general economy of violence of Poland's transition, which is marked by the exercise of different and often interlocking forms of violence. I will develop this argument by focusing on the responses to the exhibitions, especially the event of the destruction of a Twarze Bezpieki exhibition in the city of Katowice by young so-called "hooligans." I depart from the mainstream media's coverage of this destruction as pathological vandalism and use the event to explore the ordinary social world of violence in post-socialist Katowice. In this way, I offer a critical comparative perspective on transitional justice by highlighting problems concerning its entanglement with capital's violence and its appropriation into nationalist politics of sovereignty.

NATIONALIZING THE HISTORY OF VIOLENCE AFTER COMMUNISM

The majority of Twarze Bezpieki exhibitions appeared in 2006 and early 2007 in the public squares of cities and small towns in Poland. These included the capital Warsaw; the southern and western cultural and commercial centers Kraków, Wrocław, and Poznań and the deindustrialized, former working-class cities in the southwest such as Katowice and Bytom; northeast towns near Lithuania and Belorussia, like Białystok; eastern cities like Lublin and Przemysł by the Ukrainian border; and small towns in the center and villages on the Carpathian Mountains near the Slovakian border. The IPN organized these exhibitions during the rule of a coalition government formed by three right-wing parties: "Law and Justice," the radical Catholic nationalist "League of Polish Families," and the populist agrarian "Self-Defense." This government aspired to build a new "fully sovereign" Polish nation-state and sought to implement several de-communization policies concerning school curricula and public space, and through a radical form of "lustration," the screening process that discloses secret communist agents holding public office and bans them from doing so.

The IPN's exposition and representation of formerly secret figures of communism in the form of faces was not exceptional. "Facialization" of the communist past has been a common practice, especially among anti-communist nationalist groups that are heavily invested in rendering legible what they see as the "faceless evil" of communism. Integral to the moral cosmology of anti-communist nationalism, this facialization is also about defining and distributing guilt for the communist regime.

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The reckoning with the communist past in Poland and Eastern Europe has taken many forms, shaped by both international and national factors.[9] While international transitional justice discourse has informed the conceptual framework of justice and transition, the political struggles for hegemony have turned that reckoning, including history writing and mnemonic practices, into a heatedly contested issue (Kopeček 2008; Kula 2011). As a particular set of institutions and technologies of peace-building, truth-making, and reconciliation, transitional justice emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s with the demise of Soviet socialism and the ascendancy of the hegemony of neoliberal capitalism (Arthur 2009; Scott 2014). While this indicated the dissolution of certain visions of social emancipation, it also registered the moment of a memory-boom. Like the post-military dictatorships of Latin America and post-apartheid South Africa, post-socialist Eastern Europe has become the object of much ethical reflection regarding the phenomenon of cruelty and mass violence. Eastern Europe was even designated as the "ethical heart of Europe" (Snyder 2009).

The employment of the transitional justice framework has had important implications for the normative evaluations of different forms of violence. It has reinforced the moral-political hierarchy established, or at any rate promoted, by liberal capitalist modernity, which calls certain forms of violence more legitimate, necessary, or civilized than others (Asad 2007; Bourgois and Scheper-Hughes 2004). This hierarchical order typically privileges "wartime violence," characterized by its extraordinary, excessive, and spectacular quality, over "peacetime violence," characterized by its ordinary, normalized, and everyday existence (Coronil and Skurski 2005; Pandey 2006). Capital's violence, which involves the forceful creation and reproduction of class inequality, is often treated as peacetime violence; it is not only presented as necessary for economic growth but also treated as invisible. Such a normative ordering of violence eclipses much of our understanding of the complex and often perilous relationships of continuity or reproduction between different modalities of violence across time and space.[10]

[9] The reckoning with the communist past included the legal procedures to institute a new order (constitution-making); the prosecution of crimes committed during the socialist period; the restitution of property and rehabilitation of "victims of repression;" lustration or de-communization of public life; and special national memory/archival institutions (Kamiński 2011; Kuglarz 2001).

[10] I do not claim originality in this suggestion. Many critical studies have highlighted how the treatment of different forms of violence in isolation fails to grasp the relationship of "translation" or reproduction between them (e.g., Auyero, Bourgois, and Scheper-Hughes 2015; Bourgois and Scheper-Hughes 2004: 2; Das 2008). In his study of crack dealers in New York City, Bourgois described how different forms of violence worked together: "Extreme segregation, social inequality, and material misery express themselves at ground level in interpersonal conflicts that the socially vulnerable inflict mainly onto themselves (via substance abuse), onto their kin and friends (through domestic violence and adolescent gang rape), and onto their neighbors and community (with burglaries, robberies, assaults…)" (2004: 427).

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This categorization of violence has had crucial effects on the course and normative assessment of transition, and the reckoning with the communist past in Eastern Europe. While the everyday violence of capitalist transformation was normalized and considered necessary, communism was associated with a ruinous and excessively violent past. Where capitalism was placed on the side of peace and progress, communism was presented as a digression from the natural course of national history (Buchowski 2006; Porter-Szucs 2014). In the same vein, issues of social justice, particularly class inequality, have been pushed to the margins of reckoning with the past, since they are associated with the now-debunked socialist ideology (Kalb 2014; Ost 2005).

Twarze Bezpieki exhibitions need to be understood within this context. They operated as part of the dominant, anti-communist ideology of the new post-socialist republic, which has taken different forms, both liberal and conservative nationalist. The exhibitions drew on the moral and legal category of "communist crime," which had been employed in some form across many East European countries.[11] Yet, the attempts to introduce the legal concept of "communist crime" in Poland met with much criticism from different groups, including veteran dissidents.[12] The category of "communist crime" was eventually accepted as referring to the crimes of the government and state functionaries (e.g., the killing of workers, students, and violent suppression of protests); crimes of the judiciary (e.g., the violation of law by judges, such as unlawful prosecution and judicial killing, especially the death penalties during the Stalinist period); crimes of the security services (e.g., falsification of evidence, causing bodily injury); and "organized crime" by the Ministry of Interior and Public Security (Wasserman 2001).

Established in 1998 on the model of Germany's Gauck Authority, the IPN was given the mandate to document and prosecute these "communist crimes" as part of its general mission to prosecute "crimes against the Polish nation" (Dudek 2013; Pakier and Wawrzyniak 2013). The IPN has been an exceptionally well-endowed state institution that exercises a variety of pedagogical, archival, research, and prosecutorial functions. Through public pedagogies of truth-making and memory projects like Twarze Bezpieki exhibitions, the Institute aims to nationalize the contested field of memory and fill in the blank spaces of suppressed Polish history. It also takes part in penal operations outside of or alongside the formal-institutional domain of courts by publicly condemning subjects and disseminating its judgments, especially when formal prosecution was impossible, for instance due to the lack of the evidence

[11] For instance, in November 1991, Czechoslovakia declared the communist era as one of "unfreedom" and human rights violation. At the time a Polish Catholic nationalist party (KPN) proposed a similar project but parliament rejected it (Kamiński 2011).

[12] Part of this criticism had to do with the imprecise definition of "crime" in the concept of "communist crime." There was also the problem of holding people criminally responsible for acts that were legal at the time they committed them (Kulesza 2001).

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required for a criminal proceeding. Since 2007, the IPN has been checking the past links of thousands of public workers against the communist-era security archives it has vigorously guarded. However, the Institute quickly drew much antagonism, partly due to the highly restricted public access to those archives and "mysterious" leaks from them. Moreover, as historian Dariusz Stola has observed (2012), the gradual monopolization of IPN by conservative nationalist groups became a grave concern for many people.

The IPN's pedagogical and mnemonic projects quickly became absorbed into the political struggle between the two blocs of power in the country: secular liberal groups that propagate a civic vision of nationhood based on equal citizenship and human rights, and Catholic ethno-nationalist groups that embrace a vision of nationhood based on common descent, blood, and religion (Porter-Szucs 2014; Zubrzycki 2009). Until the early 2000s, the former bloc, led by liberal veteran dissidents and ex-communists, established its hegemony over the process of transition and reckoning with the communist past. Yet, the transition they led has been replete with contradictions. I will mention only three of them here. First, the rhetoric of freedom and equal rights they espoused encountered expanding social inequalities and vulnerabilities. "Shock therapy" was introduced in the early 1990s, and subsequent waves of neoliberalization rearranged state-capital-labor relations by privatizing and downsizing the state, offering incentives for foreign capital and "free trade," and cutting public spending and state subsidies for domestic production. These policies that aimed to promote "competition" and discipline labor eliminated nearly five million workplaces between 1990 and 2005 and lifted the registered unemployment rate from almost zero in 1989 to 16 percent in 1994, and then to around 20 percent in 2003–2005 with particularly high rates of 35–40 percent among young people by the time the right-wing government that organized the Twarze Bezpieki exhibitions came to power (Hardy 2009: 119–20; Kowalik 2012: 10).[13] Since Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004, some two million people have left the country to earn a living abroad (Główny Urząd Statystyczny 2013). But the violence of capitalist transformation cannot be discerned only through these numbers. As I will discuss presently, one must also consider its effects on the embodied subjectivities of people, particularly the social experience of symbolic and material dispossession in the changing relations of class, gender, and ethnicity or race.

[13] These numbers still do not reflect the changing conditions of work and unemployment, or the uneven development and experience of capitalism. "Younger and older workers, women and people living in small towns and rural areas face greater difficulties on the labor market," and agriculture, manufacture, and mining are among the most adversely affected sectors by neoliberalization that instead has expanded the service and financial sectors (Hardy 2009: 77, 139). Since mid-2000s, partly as a result of Poland's European accession that saw massive migration from Poland, the rate of registered unemployment decreased, fluctuating between 12 and 15 percent. In addition, work has become more temporary, precarious, and "flexible" (ibid).

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A second contradiction is that the ruling classes' proclamation of regained national sovereignty confronted Poland's dramatic dependence on foreign capital, international institutions like the IMF, European legal regulations, and later NATO. The increasing force of neoliberal globalization, especially via Euro-American norms and institutions, in shaping the contours of political action and economic development undermined Poland's claim to sovereignty at a historical moment when it presumably had achieved it.[14] National sovereignty is a loaded aspiration in the history of Poland, which has been marked by devastating wars, episodes of partition and military occupation, and centuries-long cultural-political and economic dependence on Western European authorities and capital (Sowa 2008; Zarycki 2014). But the perceived decline or "crisis" of sovereignty after 1989 became particularly sharp when it met with triumphalist proclamations that Poland had finally achieved independence and recovered her national origins.

The third contradiction emerged when the ruling classes entered into the Round Table agreements of 1989 to inaugurate a radical break with the past (the "thick line"), but this aspiration encountered the reality of legal, institutional, and human personnel continuities, including among members of the new "democratic" police. By following the "logic of compromise" and failing to involve different oppositional groups and ordinary citizens, the Round Table produced no common narrative of transition or process of reconciliation. This lack of "symbolic closure" of the socialist past arguably has made the foundation of the new republic particularly fragile and open to contestation, and its effects persist today (Kubik and Linch 2006, 15–18).

All these tensions and contradictions integral to the constitution of post-socialist sovereignty have provided right-wing nationalist groups with symbolic-material grounds on which to flourish. In contrast to the dominant bloc's celebration of the Round Table as the symbol of "peaceful" transition, the thriving right-wing opposition groups denounced it as a secret pact (*układ*), a treacherous beginning of the new republic. They denounced as promoting amnesia and amnesty the "thick line" policy and its vision of collective responsibility, according to which everyone was in different degrees complicit with the communist regime. In the same vein, the term "communist crime" gained a new meaning in their discourse. It came to refer at once to the past perpetrators of repression and coercion and to the ex-communists and their so-called liberal "allies," including veteran oppositionists, who supposedly secretly steered and benefited from the capitalist transition by preying on the state, especially during the notoriously opaque process of privatization during the late 1980s and early 1990s (Dunn 2004; Eyal, Szelenyi, and Townsley 2000; Staniszkis 1991). In the absence of a class-based, anti-capitalist

[14] I thank an anonymous *CSSH* reviewer for sharpening this point.

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critique and comprehensive reckoning with the communist-era state violence, contradictions of inequality and freedom and the demands for justice and accountability have become articulated with right-wing groups' moralistic discourse on national betrayal and corruption (Kalb and Halmai 2011; Ost 2005). The uneven development and structural inequalities produced by capitalist transformation were blamed on the "anti-Polish" conspiracies of communists and their secret agents. For instance, a well-known study by political scientist David Ost described how the right-wing government of Jan Olszewski in 1992 referred to the economic hardships: "Olszewski supported the free market but claimed that in Poland it did not exist: the market was run by communists, and it was these bad individuals, not the turn to a market economy, that had caused the economic hardships angering workers" (2005: 71). At the heart of this narrative, Ost wrote, was the view that "'good' capitalism was endangered by 'bad' communism" (ibid.). Once the communists were purged, Poland would enjoy a spotless, "real capitalism." Ost suggested that by embracing the utopian imaginary of "real capitalism" and blaming communism for all ills, right-wing groups not only engrained "market populism" among workers, but also obscured the roots of capitalist violence. This trend persisted well into the 2000s.[15]

The communist agent has occupied a central place in the right-wing politics of sovereignty, and within that figure capitalist violence and the legacy of communist-era state violence have become deeply entangled. It embodies past and present ills and also the "secretly" negotiated transition and "secretly" accumulated capital and privileges, and it implies a shadowy, Moscow-based, treacherous network of alliances that is larger than life. During critical moments of economic recession and corruption scandals, right-wing nationalists usually trumpeted de-communization policies, through which they claimed to be building a morally pure and *fully* sovereign nation-state. In the Twarze Bezpieki exhibitions, the faces took center stage, representing and enacting the unaccounted legacy of the communist-era violence and its various metamorphoses in the present. For instance, when Catholic nationalist groups led a failed attempt at lustration in June 1992, they came to see that failure as another sign of secret pact between ex-communists and former oppositionists. That pact was represented by the image of a double face, half belonging to Lech Wałęsa, the legendary leader of the massive "Solidarity" movement of the 1980s, and the other half to General Wojciech Jaruzelski, the author of the martial law. This image is often used during protests to denounce Wałęsa's "secret" betrayals and links with (ex-)communists (figure 2).

Together with the Stalinist period, this later period of martial law, which formally lasted from 1981 to 1984, is a common reference point in public

[15] The strategy of blaming communism in order to "legitimate" capitalism is not specific to right-wing nationalists. Liberal/neoliberal groups also make prolific use of it.

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FIGURE 2 From the protest by the house of Lech Wałęsa, 4 June 2012, "The Night of Change, 4 June 1992." Photo: Łukasz Głowala/Agencja Gazeta.

discussions on communist-era violence. It had enduring effects on the trajectory of the oppositional "Solidarity" movement. The martial law period led to the militarization of society and the fragmentation of oppositional groups and also to liberalization and privatization of the economy (Gökarıksel 2017; Kubik 1994). It inflicted different forms of violence, from the killing of striking workers and suppression of protests to administrative repression, including layoffs of "rebellious" workers and tightened control of mobility. Well-known for his dark glasses and inscrutable, cold face, General Jaruzelski enjoyed impunity and the support of almost half of the adult population; though they had personally experienced the martial law, they considered Jaruzelski a patriot who saved Poland from a possible Soviet invasion (Kwiatkowski and Weber 2006).

The figure of the face has been common in the representation of secret communist agents in Polish and other Eastern European media. This type of representation took even more dramatic forms in radical nationalist imaginary, such as one in Poland that builds on the longstanding, infamous conspiracy theory about "Judeo-Communism," which fuses anti-Semitism with anti-communism, and doubly excludes its target from the national body as a racial and political enemy. Consider, for instance, the front page of the radical nationalist weekly *Kulisy*, which specializes in unmasking secret communist agents and disseminating "discoveries" made through the former

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FIGURE 3 Front page of the weekly *Kulisy* (from the author's media archive).

security archives (figure 3). The text at the top reads, "We are publishing the content of SB/security service files. The Jewish elite in Poland. They are the secret collaborators of the criminal security service. Judeocommunism. From the IPN archives." The paper's focus is a theater director and actor, unmasked, according to the paper, as a Jew and a communist agent. This unmasking is represented with the transformation of the man's face, with his eyes turned red and his facial features given a sinister quality.

There are other examples of this type of bestial or devilish representation of secret communist agents. For instance, the nationalist weekly *Gazeta Polska* depicted academics in a similar fashion in 2005 in the heat of a radical lustration campaign, which expanded to target about seven hundred thousand people, including many in media and higher education institutions. Many professional groups and civic initiatives opposed a radical lustration bill that was prepared at this time but was later struck down by the Constitutional Court. Notice again, in figure 4, the red and transformed eyes, nose, and ears.

Such representations in anti-communist imaginary of communism as a devilish and diabolical beast are more common and powerful than they may seem. With the recent electoral victory of the Law and Justice party, the aforementioned weeklies, particularly *Gazeta Polska*, have moved into the political

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FIGURE 4 Front page of the weekly *Gazeta Polska*, "Lustration at Schools" (from the author's media archive).

mainstream. Yet these representations also hinge on a globally shared idea of "evil communism," with an emphasis on its inhumanity or bestiality, especially during the Cold War (Buck-Morss 2000).[16] The face has been central to the visualization of that idea. It is said that the "faceless evil" of communism, as the influential right-wing journalist Bronisław Wildstein put it, has been corrupting the soul of the nation and individuals, leading to a chronic "escape from responsibility" that he observes in all segments of society, especially

[16] Such anti-communist images of "Judeo-communism" were also employed widely in prerevolutionary Russia. I thank an anonymous *CSSH* reviewer for this point.

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among the intelligentsia. Showing the face of that evil and naming the communist a "collaborator" (*koloboracja*), in his view, can generate a purifying effect on the persons and society at large, even if the process is painful (Wildstein 2005). By promoting individual responsibility, this approach can heal the society that has been corrupted by communist indoctrination into diffused responsibility and collectivism.

The type of evil that Wildstein invokes is not only a trans-historical, theological evil, but is also closely related to Poland's national sovereignty. The "evil forces" unleashed by communism had been steered by Moscow, so when people betrayed their friends and family by "collaborating" with those alien forces they also betrayed their nation and the imagined all-Polish state. While this purification impulse lays the blame on that evil, it also feeds into the self-vindicating identity politics promoted by Polish conservative nationalists, based on a mythological victimization and martyrdom of the Polish nation (Mach 1997; Zubrzycki 2009). While this mythology reinforces a sense of national innocence and purity, it also prepares the ground to launch ferocious accusations of treason at those who point to Polish people's participation in mass violence, such as the Jewish pogroms of the Second World War (Tokarska-Bakir 2009; Shore 2014).

We should not underestimate the power of this anti-communist imaginary. While no massive purification happened in Poland, this does not mean that the potential force of this imaginary or fantasy of national purity—what Etienne Balibar calls "ultrasubjective violence" or "cruelty with a Medusa face"—diminished (2002: 143; 2015). That type of violence, notes Balibar, requires that "individuals and groups be represented as incarnations of evil, diabolical powers that threaten the subject from within and have to be eliminated at all costs, up to and including self-destruction" (2015: 52). If this is indeed the logic of violence that is put into practice by ethnic cleansings and genocides in former Yugoslavia and other parts of the world, as Balibar suggests, one must pay close attention to its resurgence at different moments under the guise of historical justice and truth.

WE HAVE SEEN THEM BEFORE

Each Twarze Bezpieki exhibition stayed open for at least a month and displayed the photographs of around a hundred former security officers, often of high rank, who had been employed in the area around the exhibition. The Kraków exhibition, for instance, showed the photographs of Kraków security officers so that viewers could recognize them. These were juxtaposed with a brief of the officers' careers, extracted from their personal files that the secret service had compiled to supervise its employees. An overwhelming majority of the faces belonged to uniformed men, hinting at the masculinized dimension of power exercised by the communist-era security service. Many of the elderly officers depicted on the boards appeared to have lived a life of stark reversals

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of fate and power. They had been imprisoned or deported to labor or death camps before or during the Second World War, mostly for involvement in left-wing movements. After the war some of them occupied key positions in the Stalinist-era security service and became the new jailers and patrons of violence.[17]

The IPN presented the exhibitions as part of a limited pursuit of justice at a time of what it took to be de facto amnesty. The exhibition organizers were well-aware of the concerns of the families of the exhibited security officers, but for them it was a call of duty. The laws concerning the protection of individual privacy or dignity proved ineffective in the case of exhibited officers. In the rare cases where such individual rights were invoked, the public prosecutor noted no such violation and did not pursue the cases—the public interest in the exhibitions was more important.[18] By exposing the faces of the communist officers, the exhibitions would "educate" the public and call these "shameless" people guilty, many of whom had committed "communist crimes."[19] Moreover, the faces were copied onto DVDs and special print catalogues of faces that mimicked the typography of secret police files were prepared and distributed by local IPN branches. The information that appeared in the catalogues looked as solemn and authoritative as the police files.

The exhibitions stirred up many contending views. While some criticized them harshly and accused the IPN of wasting public money, others thought them necessary. They gained remarkable publicity and instigated a great deal of face-reading. My account here is based mainly on media reports and interviews I conducted.[20] I focus on the reports that offer a more detailed sense of how the IPN framed the exhibitions and viewers' experiences of seeing the faces. An elderly man at the Rzeszów exhibition, for instance, was reported to say: "This face tells me something. I recognize it. And the other one does not look strange, either (*O, ta twarz coś mi mówi, poznaję. Ten też nie jest mi obcy*). I came here to find out about the names and faces of those who had interrogated me. I still have things to settle with these people."[21] In the opening of the Kraków exhibition, an IPN-affiliated historian assured viewers: "If evil took

[17] This information about the officers is based on the Katowice exhibition.

[18] One of the rare cases of conflict was reported here: http://www.gazetakrakowska.pl/artykul/165560,wadowice-wystawa-twarze-bezpieki-trafila-na-biurko-prokuratora,id,t.html (accessed 21 Aug. 2017).

[19] Personal communication with the IPN Katowice (21 June 2016). See also http://katowice.naszemiasto.pl/archiwum/twarze-katowickiej-bezpieki,1420570,art,t,id,tm.html (accessed 30 Mar. 2016).

[20] I first learned about the IPN exhibitions from the media and the people I interviewed during a visit to Poland in the summer of 2007 to study the topic of lustration. The idea of writing about the exhibitions occurred to me later when I kept hearing about them both from the IPN employees and lustrated people during my field research (2009–2011). I then expanded my research on the subject and in June 2016 visited Kraków and Katowice to gather more information.

[21] At: http://rzeszow.wyborcza.pl/rzeszow/1,34962,4196018.html (accessed 21 Aug. 2017).

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the form of human appearance, that would be the face of the security officers. For forty-five years these officers took part in the most deceitful apparatus of the communist dictatorship."[22] Another IPN organizer of the same exhibition was more skeptical:

> With this exhibition we destroyed the myth of physiognomy. Do these people look like thieves? No, they rather remind us of decent bureaucrats. But that is not what they are; we can immediately understand it by looking at their eyes…. These "undercovers" (*tajniacy*) have been among the wealthiest people. Of course, some of them died. But each has received 2000 PLN [about US$540] as retirement pension for working only fifteen years. They also pursued different interests. In 1989, when capitalism just germinated in Poland, they accumulated much more money than did an ordinary citizen.[23]

The figure of the communist agent brings together different kinds of secrets, many of which concerned the "secrets" of capital accumulation and state formation. It has come to embody the worst of state communism and capitalism, giving a face to the entanglement of the unaccounted communist-era state violence and the effaced capitalist violence that found expression in the social anxieties over the privileges and illicit wealth accumulated and reproduced since the socialist period. The security officers have been seen as part of the communist-era ruling class (their "shield and sword") that enjoyed special access to public benefits and services. The complaint about these officers' undeserved possessions, privileges, and retirement pensions has been a popular theme of right-wing discourse, and was also voiced by some viewers of the exhibitions.[24] In the same vein, other IPN commentaries on the exhibitions stressed the "foreignness" of communist officers by pointing to their Jewish origins, their "Russianization" before or during the war, or their communist convictions; how they "felt and spoke Soviet."[25]

But the viewers' responses to the exhibitions no less revolved around the decipherment of their neighbors. For instance, one elderly man from the Białystok exhibition said, "I found here the pictures of two acquaintances. I learned that they had worked for the state security, denounced people, and were not punished. This public stigmatization is probably the most humiliating for them."[26] Not everyone was of the same opinion. Another visitor to the same exhibition said, "What is all this for? It is already the past. This exhibition is of no use to anyone. The young do not understand and the old need to forget." Some of the young people I talked to about the exhibitions made similar comments and even likened them to obscene political pornography. Some well-known former worker dissidents also viewed the exhibition

[22] At: http://niedziela.pl/wydruk/78926/nd (accessed 21 Aug. 2017).
[23] At: http://gosc.pl/doc/766256.Twarze-bezpieki (accessed 21 Aug. 2017).
[24] See, e.g., http://www.poranny.pl/wiadomosci/bialystok/art/5119672,twarze-bialostockiej-bezpieki-wideo,id,t.html (accessed 21 Aug. 2017).
[25] At: http://blogmedia24.pl/node/69842 (accessed 21 Aug. 2017).
[26] Ibid.

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negatively. Władysław Frasyniuk, for instance, compared the Wrocław exhibition to the Soviet practice of exposing enemy faces in the press and asked when the IPN would organize a public shooting of the unmasked people.[27]

During my fieldwork I noticed a fear the exhibited faces instilled in those who saw that men who had contacted them decades before had been secret service officers. Some were left wondering whether they might have been registered as a secret informer. Let me mention two examples. One is Witold (a pseudonym) whom I met when he was about to have his lustration hearing at the district court of Kraków. He was in his late seventies and a retired judge of a provincial town on the Carpathians. He told me how strange it was to see that the man who had been contacting him to gather information about the things happening at the court had actually been a prominent security officer. It was not that he was surprised to discover that fact; talking to those men from the Ministry of Interior, he said, was a common practice at the time. What astonished him was the current government's ability to publicly expose those men in public squares. My second example concerns a lustration court hearing that I observed. A retired security archivist named Joanna (a pseudonym) during her testimony told the court with notable disturbance about the moment she saw the face of the officer she had been in touch with. In a trembling, dry voice, she emphasized that she was only an archivist and never took part in any "operation" or interacted with "suspects" like that man had. Yet, seeing him defaced on a huge billboard seemed to transport Joanna to a reckoning that was incomprehensible to the court.

In a sense, the exhibitions seemed to have achieved some of their goals by performing the sovereign power of the state dominated by the right-wing government. The IPN spectacles of justice were a perfect site to discern how the right-wing project of sovereignty worked by showing the former state's secrets and, more importantly, by signaling that it was capable of *doing much more*. By taking on the longstanding historical aspiration of national sovereignty (which has been shared by almost all major political groups of contemporary Poland), the right-wing government claimed to resolve the "crisis" of sovereignty that Poland faced vis-à-vis neoliberal globalization and Europeanization. With the exposition of the faces, they also exposed the alleged anti-Polish conspiracy of people who had worked for Moscow and the communist state (which now appeared utterly foreign) and who had illicitly accumulated wealth and privilege. But the IPN exhibitions also highlighted how highly contested the right-wing sovereignty project was. Its claim to pursue truth and dispense justice for the "victims of communism" was heatedly criticized by many, including people who had been targeted by the communist-era security service.

[27] At: http://wroclaw.wyborcza.pl/wroclaw/1,35771,3512158.html (accessed 21 Aug. 2017).

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How did the exhibitions produce such conflicting reactions? Part of this, I think, has to do with the question of who does what and in the name of whom, which takes us to the heart of representative democracy, particularly what Lefort (1986) refers to as the "empty place" of power. The democratic government inhabits that place temporarily by claiming to rule in the name of the "people," which it calls into being by invoking it (Laclau 2005). What matters is how this claim is made, through what forms of political action and rhetorical strategies. That is also why seemingly unrelated elements of a political struggle are indeed *part* of the broader struggle and understood as such by the relevant actors. The meaning of the transparency or justice pursued by the IPN exhibitions is not self-evident, but rather is articulated through other elements, with which it functions in its political-ideological discourse. This is one reason, I think, why many people did not view the kind of transparency projects the IPN organized in isolation, but rather saw them as part of the broad nationalist project of moral purification. In contrast to the IPN organizers' claim, one did not see the exhibition in a "face-to-face" setting. There was no such unmediated "pure justice" of the exposition of the secrets or any abstract "ethical scene" isolated from ongoing relations of power and historical-political conjuncture.

But the conflicting reactions to the exhibitions also raise questions about the mode of presentation or exposition of the secrets and particularly the figure of the face. We have seen how the exposed faces of communist officers mediated the suspicions of betrayal, fears of repression, and desires for justice and equality concerning the communist past and post-socialist present. In what follows, I examine further this affective and mediatory role of the face, and focus on the following question, which so far has lingered in the background: what is it about the face that makes it particularly evocative and powerful, but at the same time makes shaming perpetrators and exposing their violence problematic or risky?

PHOTOGRAPHY AND DEFACEMENT: "LABOR OF THE NEGATIVE"[28]

Exhibiting the hidden history of the former security apparatus and redeploying its artifacts of power to facilitate a break from the past may generate unexpected reactions. This may be partly because such exhibition and redeployment run the risk of mimicking what they are intended to overcome. While seeking to mobilize fear and hatred of the past, they also reveal the fragile constitution of the current ideological order of post-socialism.

The IPN spectacles' reliance on the face may scarcely seem striking, since public defamation through defacement is a well-established practice historically. As is often noted, the face has long been entwined with questions of

[28] I borrow the phrase "labor of the negative" from Taussig (1999).

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identity, honor, shame, and humanity. In the Polish language the word face (*twarz*) also conveys meanings related to those questions. One sometimes saves and sometimes loses face under difficult conditions, or when subjected to a test of truth.[29] Moreover, in Poland the face has in certain contexts become a highly loaded symbol. For instance, the "scarred face" of the Black Madonna may remind Polish people of "their historical suffering and their 'miraculous' survival as a nation" (Zubrzycki 2009: 28). Indeed, many renowned Polish writers and scholars have drawn on the face to reflect on the historical tragedies of war and reconstruction (Miłosz 1973); moral dilemmas of betrayal (Herbert 2008); ethical encounters with the Other (Tischner 2012); and the intersubjective, communicative space of the face, which may both fix one's identity and create a potential for becoming (Gombrowicz 1965). Likewise, in Eastern European literature on violence and Soviet communism, the face has been a critical site of power, truth, and collectivity (e.g., Grossman 2012; Serge 2014). Moreover, "facialization" of history—the representation of history as a series of faces—has a special valor in the historical discourse on the former East Bloc. While it draws on the popular phrases in transitional justice discourse such as facing history, it also indexes a will to render legible what has been considered the "faceless" totalitarian regime or, again, what Wildstein called "faceless evil" (2005). "Socialism with a human face" was the motto of the late 1960s efforts to renew and prevent socialism from becoming a bureaucratic machine, while the post-socialist facialization of history seeks to foreclose the possibility of a future socialism by memorializing the "communist crimes" in the form of criminal faces.

For centuries, the face has been thought to make visible what is invisible, reveal one's inner truth or guilt, qualify one's moral and social standing, and place one in a racial hierarchy as in ancient or modern physiognomy.[30] Facelessness also pointed to certain problems. The medieval historian Valentin Groebner (2008) observed that when violence appeared indescribable, when it was exceptionally cruel, it was often called "faceless" and its victims were also "anonymized" as faceless. Certainly, a central element of the historical discourse on the face is the question of visibility and its relation to the secret. Located at the crossroads of visibility and invisibility, the face closely associates truth with visibility, transparency, or the exposition of the secret. Modern state apparatuses have capitalized on the seemingly "discerning" capacity of the face to identify secrets and capture the truth (Deleuze and Guattari 2012). However, as much as it is a tool for fixation, a point of arrival, the face is

[29] Maria Szkutnik's (2003) well-known Polish-English dictionary associates *twarz* with shame and trustworthiness, as is conveyed by the phrases "losing face" or "having two faces." Nowak and Zimny's Polish political dictionary (2009) highlights similar usages of the word "face."

[30] The face has been taken to represent who one really is, or the essence of one's political or moral motivations. As Groebner (2008) observed, the scholarly culture of fourteenth-century Europe tended to see "facial flaws" as signs of sin.

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also a point of departure. The movements that make up the face are so contingent and elusive that the face often seems at once "the mask and window to the soul" (Taussig 1999). As much as it tells us about the power that strives to make its subject population more transparent and legible, the face also points to the ever-presence of duplicity and illegibility, the "two-facedness," which can be used strategically to divert the gaze of state agents (Nelson 2009). Turning the strategy of identification and capture back on the state itself, the pictures of the faces of the "disappeared" or victims of state violence have been employed in political protests around the world, including in Argentina, South Africa, Turkey, the United States, and Poland, to demand accountability.

Yet, unearthing perilous truths and bringing secrets into the open by *exhibiting* them is often marked by uncertainty and unknowability. This is not only because of the ambiguity of the face; uncertainty creeps in even when there is barely any room for spontaneity, with no actual face-to-face encounter between the former security officer and the spectator. The IPN had already attempted to fix the meaning of the photographs of security officers' faces long before viewers ever saw them exhibited: they are the perpetrators whom one has seen on the street without knowing who they really are. The use of photography for this purpose is unsurprising. The eminent art historian Alan Trachtenberg wrote:

> The face showed the person, traces of personal history and what lay inside: dispositions, desires, and inclinations. Photography encouraged scrutiny of faces for clues to meaning, signs of intentions: the medium seemed a second eyesight, capable of 'fixing' ephemeral facial gestures for close and even closer examination…. Understood as a picture with a tale to tell, the photographed face seemed a surety that persons were knowable in their visage, the image offering a surrogate for face-to-face sociality in an increasingly distended order (2007: 69–70).

However, fixing that meaning is no less difficult than unmasking the face.[31] Even when photography claimed to index reality and perform an objective "face-reading," as physiognomy claimed to do, it failed on several points. It was not enough to take a picture of the face. The "harsh literalness" of the photograph, if unmitigated, would be misleading. "Because the camera portrays the false as truly as it does the true, the portraitist had to strive for a 'natural' (undissembled) expression of faces and bodies" (ibid.: 84). But this did not exclude the usage of artifice; many photographers built portrait studios, "surrogate theaters," where the face could perform itself and be rendered truthfully as in a "natural" setting.

If photographs played an important role as a surrogate for face-to-face relations uprooted by modernity, what interests me here is how they function in IPN exhibitions as "surrogate theaters" or spectacles of justice. Far from being a procedure of justice shaped by citizens through their *active* participation, the spectacles of the photographed faces of the security officers were

[31] See, e.g., Bachelard (1971) and Levi-Strauss (1982).

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first and foremost a state spectacle of justice. "Punishment-as-spectacle," as Foucault described it, condensed judgment and execution into the single moment of public torture. The publicity of the execution was necessary not only to prevent future crimes, but also to instill fear in the spectators who witnessed its violence. It was to make these spectators complicit in the violence. "Not only must people know, they must see with their own eyes. Because they must be made to be afraid; but also because they must be the witnesses, the guarantors, of the punishment, and because they must to a certain extent take part in it…. The vengeance of the people was called upon to become an unobtrusive part of the vengeance of the sovereign" (1979: 58–59).

The IPN exhibitions do not involve the kind of physical violence and spectatorship that characterized the public punishments of early modern Europe that Foucault discussed. They operate under a different norm and regulation of publicity, transparency, and legal rights. Yet, they also aim to mobilize people's curiosity and vengeance and instill fear in the spectators. Their targets are not only the former security officers, but also those "out there" who are yet to be exposed. However, as in "punishment-as-spectacle," there is no guarantee for the intended effect. The shame imposed on the criminal may strike back and become the shame of law's violence. The object to be destroyed may augment its haunting power in that very destruction. The secret that is exposed may reproduce its mystery in the act of exposition, and the face may grow "magical" qualities in the act of defacement (Taussig 1999). As W.J.T. Mitchell (1987) noted, the iconoclast is very much enveloped by the act of destruction, the dialectic of iconoclasm. Just as the spectacles of punishment of early modern Europe offered a site for different illegalities, popular protest, and the unpredictable reaction of huge crowds that gathered in public squares, the IPN was unsure how the exhibitions would be received. For one thing, they were well-aware of the widespread criticisms of the exhibitions, especially regarding the kind of justice they claimed to dispense. For another, the IPN was concerned with how to guard the exhibitions against the former security officers, who might be contriving to attack them.

Finally, an attack of remarkable magnitude hit the exhibition in Katowice, the city which was once considered the heart of socialism, famous for its rich coal mines, and now, or at least until recently, one of the abandoned cities of post-socialist Poland. It was March 2007, during the heat of the right-wing de-communization proposal, when the head of the IPN Katowice branch opened the exhibition with these words: "John F. Kennedy said that it is necessary to forgive enemies, but never forget their faces. […] We do not have here anyone who is morally innocent. Even though only some of them actually committed crimes, they were all functionaries of the system" (figure 1).[32]

[32] At: http://m.onet.pl/wiadomosci/kraj/kujawsko-pomorskie,95g2y (accessed 22 Feb. 2013).

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Ten days after this speech five people between the ages of sixteen and twenty-nine, one of them female, attacked the exhibition in the dark of the night. The exhibition was in the main market square in a relatively affluent area and displayed some eighty-four faces on huge boards. The police reported that it was pure vandalism. "Without any premeditation" the drunkard "hooligans" (as they were called) destroyed almost half of the exhibition, cracking sixteen of thirty-two iron boards and tearing even their corners and legs. The IPN spokesperson promised to finish repairing the damage within a week, until which the damaged boards would remain empty rectangles without pictures, transparent as a window. The media report mentioned in passing that while vandalizing the exhibition the "hooligans" had also shattered the windows of a few cars, including an expensive Mercedes parked nearby (figure 5).[33]

What is revealing in this defacement of the exhibition, which itself defaces the ex-security officers, is not just that the exhibition paradoxically augments the power of the secret that it attempts to expose. Nor is it just that the IPN's transparency project ended up generating more suspicions than revelations. Might the exposed officers themselves have hired these people? Or was it pure vandalism, meaningless violence, as the mainstream media and police suggested? I want to propose another interpretation beyond the conspiracy theories and the trivialization of the issue by reference to rampant alcoholism or hooliganism. No less revealing, in my view, is the windows of that expensive car that were destroyed "accidentally," the car about which there is no secret except the "secret" of commodity fetishism and primary accumulation that Karl Marx famously discussed (1992). What is also revealed here is the contradiction of the post-socialist capitalist transition, which at once promised justice and freedom for all yet at the same time deprived millions of citizens of the means to live a decent life, labeling them, in Zygmunt Bauman's words, the "collateral damage" of transition (2011). I turn now to this contradiction, especially its subjective embodied effects and the kind of violence it germinates.

THE GENERAL ECONOMY OF VIOLENCE OF TRANSITION

I take this scene of destruction in Katowice as a point of encounter between heterogeneous forms of violence that are combined in a single, general economy of violence. This economy of violence pervades the social spatial environment of urban life and shapes the living conditions of the "vandals" and envelops their act of destruction. The scene of that destruction brings into focus the intersection of the violence represented by the communist-era security officers, the violence exercised by the state spectacle's exposition of them, as well as the

[33] At: http://wiadomosci.onet.pl/kujawsko-pomorskie/wandale-zdewastowali-wystawe-twarze-katowickiej-bezpieki/1rzlw (accessed 6 June 2016). Maciej Durny from the IPN Katowice said that a few cars were destroyed.

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FIGURE 5 Katowice Twarze Bezpieki exhibition after the destruction. Photo: Marcin Tomalka/ Agencja Gazeta.

violence of capitalist transition, which refers to the uneven, social effects of capital accumulation. These effects are manifest dramatically in the experience of symbolic and material inequality and dispossession, anxieties of betrayal and abandonment, and the upsurge of destructive and self-destructive tendencies.[34] I have thus far highlighted the problem of complicity and entanglement between the first two forms of violence: the communist-era state violence and the nationalist projects to convert, overcome, and settle accounts with that violence, albeit by deploying similar mechanisms of sovereign violence. This latter type of violence is animated by the imaginary of national purification, the fantasy of absolute national sovereignty that involves the expulsion of internal and external enemies from the national body and the aspiration for a total correspondence between the state and the nation.

As I have said, the figure of the face has been central to sovereignty politics. Political groups commonly invoke it to visualize themselves and their opponents, but the face is not simply a contentless, empty instrument. Its long history has been entwined with the moral-political questions of truth, visibility, guilt, and knowability. While this makes the face particularly useful for

[34] This is certainly not an "original" account of "capitalist violence." What I describe can be observed in many other locations, especially among those hit hard by neoliberal policies. See, e.g., Bourgois 2004.

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right-wing populist groups that rely on a highly moralized, nationalist imaginary (they typically define their opponents as morally corrupt enemies of the nation) (Müller 2016), those moral-political questions are not so easily contained, and they linger even when the political power seeks to instrumentalize and "fix" the meaning of the face.

When the IPN exhibitions exposed the faces of communist-era security officers, the secret they exposed had many layers. They appeared to facialize not only the unaccounted violence of past state repression and coercion, but also the privileges and wealth that (ex-)communist officers had or were imagined to have accumulated since the socialist period. The thick narrative about their shady privileges and secret powers must have enchanted further the faces that the IPN exhibitions showed in grandeur. In this way, those faces came to mediate all sorts of fears and desires, communicating things that are at once wicked, corrupt, and attractive. This ambivalent effect, in my view, partly explains the attack of the young "vandals" on the Katowice exhibition. The so-called "accidental" destruction of the windows of the expensive car parked nearby supports this interpretation.

Yet, this focus on the scene of destruction has limited explanatory value toward understanding the social dynamics and the general economy of violence enveloping the destruction. I will not mimic the police work by focusing on the individual motivations of the faceless "vandals," who were made anonymous by the media reports of their pathological and incomprehensible destruction (the police reported that the destruction had not been planned). Instead, I will explore where these young people may have come from, in search of possible sources of destruction that transcend their individual motives for destruction. The account of Maciej Durny, the organizer and security guard of the IPN Katowice exhibition, supports this line of interpretation. He recalled to me that after the destruction one of the boys later came to the IPN to ask forgiveness. These young people, Durny observed, knew little about either the exposed faces or the IPN's project. They were out that night drinking around the shiny market square in the grey landscape of Katowice. He told me several times that there was nothing extraordinary about this group of young guys (*chłopaki*), and such acts of destruction happened quite often. In the end, he said, the IPN decided not to take the case to court.[35]

It is precisely that ordinary world of destruction that interests me here, the world in which the destruction of the exhibition was embedded. To make sense of that world, I want to draw on the Polish anthropologist Tomasz Rakowski's (2007; 2009) ethnographic research on the embodied and psychic tendencies of destruction that are widespread among former miners and their families in the deindustrialized region of Śląsk, where Katowice is located. Rakowski focused

[35] Personal communication with Maciej Durny, 21 June 2016.

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his research on the nearby city of Wałbrzych. As in Katowice and other cities of the region, life there largely depended on employment in coal mines. The transition brought about the closure of many supposedly inefficient mines and generated a wave of newly deskilled and unemployed "surplus" people. Wałbrzych, Rakowski asserts, became a perfect site to study the "social trauma" of the transition (see also Wódz and Wódz 2006). In response to the closures, ex-miners sought to utilize their skills by digging holes around the city. The children of the former working class also joined in this business of "illegal" or "semi-legal mines." Soon the city witnessed to what Rakowski called "salvage fever," the salvaging of objects found in the holes, some of which belonged to their recent, now literally underground history of employment (2007: 184). A "peculiar destructive environment" permeated everything, Rakowski noted, and he pointed out that this destruction was accompanied by repetitive, monological talk of self-destruction. This involved "blowing up" not only the ruinous worthless city, but also their disintegrating, sick bodies worn out by years of heavy work. "Who cares if my lungs blow up?" a former miner asked. As another put it, "I'll go down and be buried" (ibid.: 192).

Rakowski suggests that this violence registers the general void, the sense of abandonment, that characterizes the social life of the mines, as well as the bodies and psychologies of the former working class. This is the untold, corporeal dimension of capitalist transition. The self, as it were, lost its anchor in reality, and the distinction between inner and external worlds became fuzzier than ever. All of this prepared the subjective ground for the projection of secret enemies, fantasies of destruction, and a sort of "sadistic satisfaction" conveyed by them (ibid.: 201).

One does not have to fully agree with Rakowski's analysis to appreciate his perceptive account of these destructive tendencies, which can be observed in many other deindustrialized, post-socialist cities (e.g., Kideckel 2008; Stenning et al. 2010). Curiously, in another deindustrialized city near Katowice called Bytom, the same Twarze Bezpieki exhibition was also defaced. Some people scavenged the aluminum boards to sell them in the marketplace of salvaged objects. The dispossessed of the transition are subjected not only to different forms of destruction, but also to pathologization and cultural stigmatization by the mainstream media as being lazy, wastrels, or vandals. This type of blaming has a history that extends back at least to the communist era, during which political authorities used a similar language. But this cultural stigmatization in the context of capitalist transformation also must be seen as part of what Michał Buchowski (2006) calls the "internal societal orientalization" of the poor, the so-called "losers" of the transition. The poor were never just poor, but were also called uncivilized, redundant, and generally incompatible with Poland's new capitalism. They were rendered invisible by the pervasive violence of capitalist transition. Unlike the faces of the former security officers that were revealed in public squares, their faces do not elicit

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attention; on the contrary, they appear as an indistinct mass, the faceless damage of the capitalist transition.

The destruction of the Katowice exhibition Twarze Bezpieki can be understood as part of this generalized economy of violence that marks the deindustrialized cities and abandoned subjects of post-socialism. It is a type of violence that does not necessarily have a well-conceived political target or plan. It is, as it were, a violence without addressee, and not a revolt or resistance against capitalism or communism. The destruction, in my view, is better seen as "delinquent" violence symptomatic of capital's "indirect, delegated extermination" of human bodies by turning them into a disposable waste (Ogilvie quoted in Balibar 2015: 56). This "ultraobjective violence," to use Balibar's term, involves capital's transformation of human beings into things, or abandonment to their fate of the people who were made a surplus population. Such conditions of alienation, precariousness, and disenfranchisement, as is well known, provide a fertile soil for the growth of radical nationalist groups. That is also why the Polish sociologist Stefan Czarnowski's 1930s study of fascism and its social base among the youth recently enjoyed a revival in Poland within efforts to understand the effects of capitalist transition (Tarkowska 2013). Czarnowski developed the notion of "disposable people" (*ludzie zbędni*) in his study of how fascist groups propagating violence recruited marginalized people across social classes.

The actual destroyers of the Katowice exhibition may not identify with anti-communist nationalist groups. Yet, part of the allure of destruction, I think, has to do with the faces of the communist officers that appeared at the center of the performance of sovereign justice. Exposing their faces on the big boards at the city's main square, the exhibition paradoxically exalted them with grandiosity and they became objects of different sorts of energies and desires, in a way resembling Foucault's description of the illegalities that sporadically surfaced in the spectacles of punishment. If one of the aims of the exhibition was to show how the new state exacted vengeance on the public enemy, its counterviolence also became the breeding ground for different acts of violence. Thus, it may be in that subliminal moment of sovereign violence that we can grasp the magnitude of the "transgressive" violence of "vandals," violence that is beyond utility or political end.

POSTSCRIPT: THE RETURN OF THE FACE

I have thus far focused on the IPN spectacles of justice and their destruction to explore the nexus of sovereignty, violence, and transitional justice. This analysis brings a comparative perspective to the global field of transitional justice. While transitional justice is commonly associated with "progressive" political and human rights activists who deal with the legacy of right-wing military dictatorships or the apartheid, as in South America or South Africa, I have focused here on what we might call the "dark side" of transitional justice, the

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sources and consequences of transitional justice's entanglement with nationalist politics of sovereignty and capital's violence. Certainly, the tensions and contradictions of privatized freedom, inequality, and dependency that are central to the making of post-socialist sovereignty, and give way to right-wing populism, are hardly unique to Poland or even to Eastern Europe; they mark the condition of many other peripheries of world historical capitalism and modernity (Kalb and Halmai 2011; Pobłocki 2017). The IPN exhibitions were a part of the right-wing government's response to what it took to be a "crisis" of national sovereignty and the legacy of communist-era state violence. Yet, the exhibited faces of communist-era security officers did not deliver only the "message" the IPN intended, nor did this exposition turn out to be a straightforward pedagogy for the spectator citizens. Its complicity with the same kind of violence that it claimed to overcome stirred much suspicion. While the exposed faces appeared to be objects of desires for justice and knowledge, and of fear of state repression and surveillance, they also harbored other secrets. The (secret) communist agent, a key actor in nationalist cosmology, has come to embody the major tensions and contradictions of post-socialist capitalism, filling a role similar to other "magical" figures in different cosmologies of capitalism (Taussig 1980).[36] But one cannot speak of an even distribution of light across all of the secrets. While the communist officers' exposed faces have made "evil communism" grandly visible, the faces of the "vandals" and "losers" of the transition, the so-called collateral damage, remain in the dark. The anti-communist imaginary not only displaces the social consequences and structural dynamics of post-socialist capitalism, but also jeopardizes the prospects for a critically engaged, more comprehensive reckoning with the communist past.

That is not simply a result of the actions of some ill-willed nationalists, obsessed with their entrenched anti-communism or blinded by capitalist zeal. This phenomenon points to a broader, theoretical problem concerning the moral-political hierarchies established between different forms of violence by transitional justice, and liberal capitalist modernity generally. These hierarchies eclipse our understandings of the complex temporal and conjunctural relations between different forms of violence. Employing a linear and homogeneous concept of time and a narrowly circumscribed, static notion of violence, they typically normalize the "peacetime" violence of capitalism and isolate it from the reckonings with *past* "wartime" or "illiberal" violence. However, the violence of capitalism and its cultural-political mediations can seriously shape or undermine seemingly unrelated pursuits of justice. Imposing a dichotomy obscures a more comprehensive understanding of the social sources and

[36] For instance, Taussig perceptively discussed how the popular "devil-belief" in Colombia articulated the embodied contradictions of the "transition" from a peasant mode of production to the capitalist mode in the figure of the devil, which was believed to secretly help one accumulate wealth (1980).

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experiences of violence, which may then become the object of a right-wing sovereignty politics that employs the imaginary of national-moral purification.

The electoral victory of the Law and Justice party in November 2015 showed how that imaginary does not leave politics so long as the sources of disappointment with capitalist transformation are not effectively engaged. The right-wing government today, three decades after the dissolution of state communism, continues to make a great use of the language of de-communization. This language is intimately tied to its prolific discourse on treason and hideous enemies. As the government aspires to change the constitutional framework of the republic, de-communize the public space, and "re-polonize" the economy, law, media, and politics, it denounces its opponents as "communists and thieves," "people with blood on their hands," and "the worst type of Poles" who are almost genetically incompatible to be members of the Polish nation (Łętowska 2017). The response has been a series of protests that continue today and are often attended by big crowds claiming to defend Polish democracy against what they see as a conservative authoritarian setback.

In one of those protests, in December 2015, participants held up an empty frame with the text "The Worst Type of Poles" and placed their own faces within it (figure 6). This mocking self-exposition had the image of the face



FIGURE 6 During the anti-government protests, December 2015, "The Worst Type of Poles." Photo: Aleksandra Żelazińska.

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of the leader of the Law and Justice Party, Jarosław Kaczyński, with the iconic dark glasses of General Wojciech Jaruzelski. The protesters thereby invoked the empty place of power and claimed another definition of the "people" beyond its ethno-nationalist iteration. This is the space of political struggle over truth and history, of communication indispensable to any democratic politics worthy of the name. For such communication to work, though, the common must be recovered from the entrenched liberal/conservative nationalist divide.[37] Instead of drawing out Poland's best or worst face, one may say, with Witold Gombrowicz, "Take pity on your faces, take pity on my face, for a face is not an object, but a subject, a subject, a subject!" (1965: 65).

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[37] For instance, a commentator referring to the "civilized" manner of the protesters called them "The Best Face of Poland," contrasting them with "primitive" conservatives: http://wyborcza.pl/1,75968,19335878,bylem-i-widzialem-najlepsza-twarz-polski.html (accessed 30 Mar. 2016).

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Abstract: This article explores the nexus of sovereignty, violence, and transitional justice through an analysis of the public exhibitions of the faces of communist-era secret service officers in Poland. During the rule of right-wing government from 2005 to 2007, the state-run Institute of National Remembrance (IPN) organized exhibitions in public squares across Poland, which stirred much contention. Was it a pursuit of justice or a call for public lynching? Was it a means to ensure public transparency and identify the "faceless" evil of communism, or instead a political instrument of anti-communist nationalists? In some places, like the deindustrialized city of Katowice, the exhibition even met with devastating attacks. Focusing on this event in Katowice, I use media reports, interviews, and other ethnographic material to explore what the IPN-led state spectacles of justice, particularly the figure of the face and the defacement practices they employ, reveal about tensions and contradictions of "post-socialist" sovereignty; how the figure of the (secret) communist agent has come to facialize both the unfinished reckoning with communist-era state violence and the "normalized" violence of capitalist transformation. I argue that past violence, which is the typical object of transitional justice, needs to be approached in a dynamic and relational manner, with a focus on the conjunctures—how different forms of violence become transformed, reproduced, or entangled across time and space. My comparative perspective on transitional justice highlights the problems caused when its nationalist appropriation becomes entangled with capital's violence.

Key words: transitional justice, sovereignty, violence, face, right-wing populism, post-socialism, Poland, Eastern Europe

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